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Am I Too Old For Psychotherapy?

By Paul R. Sachs, Ph.D.

Many people mistakenly believe that older adults are too set in their ways to benefit from psychotherapy. In fact, older adults have many assets that make them good candidates – including having a breadth of experience and emotional maturity that can help them to put life's problems in perspective. They are also usually less constrained by work or family responsibilities, so they can concentrate more fully on the work of psychotherapy.

To be sure, older adults present the psychotherapist with different problems than do younger adults. Concerns about health and the physical limitations caused by aging or illness are common. Unfortunately, clinical depression is widespread among older adults. Older couples may face adjustments associated with retirement, or situations in which one spouse must care for the other. Finally, some older adults use psychotherapy as a way of resolving feelings of regret and affirming their choices and accomplishments in life.

No specific technique of psychotherapy is consistently more successful than others with older adults. Rather, the ingredients for effective psychotherapy are: a clearly defined problem to resolve, specific treatment goals, a well-motivated older adult, and an experienced clinician who appreciates the distinctive skills that an older adult can bring to psychotherapy.

Talk to someone who can help. If you would like the name of a qualified psychologist in your area, please try our Psychologist Locator.